

## A COMPROMISE CODE

Factory farming has been a subject of sometimes heated controversy ever since the publication of Mrs. Ruth Harrison's "Animal Machines". To the impact of that book may be attributed the setting up of the Brambell committee on the welfare of farm animals, and the subsequent attempts to produce codes of reasonable practice for different classes of farm stock. The first four of these, made public yesterday, are admitted compromises and like most compromises will not find universal favour. The 160-odd organizations which have been invited to comment on them can be relied on to emphasize their weak points. The criteria for judgment are not always easy to establish. The farmer will say that the animal or bird which goes on producing milk or eggs and gaining in weight is clearly not unhappy. The humanitarians and, indeed, some animal behaviourists will have their doubts.

This is not to say that farmers are inhumane. Most of them are really concerned for the welfare of their stock, but economic interest also enters into their thinking on the matter. It cannot be entirely ignored in the general consideration of intensive animal production to meet the needs of an increasing human population; without intensivism we might well be hard put to it to feed

ourselves in the way to which we have become used. In such circumstances, compromise is perhaps inevitable.

The effect of the present proposals, which may well be considerably amended before they reach Parliament about May next year, is to stress a good many points of ordinary good stockmanship. Without this no code and no legal sanctions will have any real value or effect. They seem likely to put an end to such practices as the production of white veal from confined and specially dieted calves, which has never extended very far in this country. This may well involve the banning of veal imports produced under similar conditions abroad.

The pig code could well sound the death-knell of those notorious "sweat-boxes", whose extension has probably been restricted as much by the dislike for them of workers as any consideration of the comfort of the inmates. Many will be disappointed that the provisions relating to the keeping of fowls in battery cages do not go further than they do. The code is more lax than the original proposals of the Brambell committee and closer to modern commercial practice. This is certainly an area where a great deal more study is necessary, bringing in the behaviourist as well as those whose concern is purely with bodily health and economic performance.

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